5. The main military confrontation lines between the Georgian and Abkhaz forces have virtually remained unchanged since the capture of the town of Gagra by the Abkhaz forces in early October. The Georgian troops have been unable to regain lost territory, while the Abkhaz forces have been unsuccessful in capturing Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, which has been subjected to regular shelling attacks by Abkhaz units. At the end of December 1992, the Government of Georgia declared a state of emergency in Sukhumi.

6. Since mid-October 1992, the fighting between the Abkhaz and Georgian forces took place in two main areas in which military frontlines have been established. One such frontline covers the area of the Gumista river, immediately north of Sukhumi. That frontline has a length of approximately 12 kilometres, stretching from the Black Sea coast to the village of Ashalsheni. The nine-day cease-fire agreement referred to in paragraph 2 covered only 6 kilometres east of the Black Sea of this confrontation line along the Gumista river. Since the end of November 1992 intensive shelling has taken place in the Gumista river area, involving the use of artillery, multiple rocket launchers, mortars and tanks. Both sides also have been constantly reinforcing their entrenchments along this frontline. Moreover, shelling outside this region into surrounding villages and, in particular, the city of Sukhumi, has become more frequent. Both sides have reported heavy casualties and great material losses. The shelling of civilian populated areas is an almost daily occurrence, increasing the number of casualties and the flow of refugees.

7. In the beginning of January, Abkhaz forces temporarily succeeded, for the first time, to launch an attack through the Georgian frontline at the Gumista river. Abkhaz units were reportedly able to capture parts of a village but, within a few hours, they were forced back across the river by the Georgian side. In mid-January, Abkhaz forces launched an attack from the Black Sea, using small boats with heavy machine-guns and rocket launchers. This attempt to land small units on Georgian-controlled territory also failed.

8. The other major fighting area is the region between the towns of Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli. In this mountainous area there are no clear-cut frontlines. The terrain is conducive to guerilla-like military activities. The Georgian side has established control over the area south and east of the town of Ochamchira, which is located about 55 kilometres south-east of Sukhumi on the Black Sea. The Georgians are also in control of the coastline between Ochamchira towards the Kodori river, approximately 20 kilometres south-east of Sukhumi. Abkhaz forces, on the other hand, control the Ochamchira district to the east of that coastline, from Ochamchira to the town of Tkvarcheli.

9. The village of Tamysh, located about 10 kilometres north-west of Ochamchira, has become the focus of the ongoing fighting to gain control of the coast road and especially the railway connecting Abkhazia with Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. In the beginning of December 1992, fighting intensified in this area and both sides claimed to have launched an offensive, but no major territorial gains were made by either side. However, from time to time,

the Abkhaz forces succeeded in cutting off the Georgian-controlled roads along the coast.

10. In the first half of January 1993, the fighting in this area has again intensified. The Georgian forces seem to have succeeded in widening their control over the coastal area between Ochamchira and the Kodori river by several kilometres.

11. There are also reports of increased use of anti-aircraft missiles in the areas of hostilities. Both sides have reportedly obtained SAM surface-to-air missiles, leading to the downing of two Georgian helicopters. Furthermore, one Russian military helicopter was shot down as well as a Russian SU-25 plane.

12. A particularly grave incident occurred on 14 December 1992 when a Russian helicopter crashed while flying over Abkhaz territory killing some 60 persons, mostly women and children. The cause of this incident remains a matter of controversy.

13. The Georgian authorities have more than once expressed their concern that some of the Russian military units stationed in Abkhazia are supporting the Abkhaz forces. In this connection, Mr. Shevardnadze has made several public statements demanding that the Russian troops in Abkhazia be placed under the direct command of the Transcaucasian Military District of the Russian military which has its headquarters in Tbilisi.

14. The Georgian and Abkhaz sides continue to accuse each other of serious human rights violations in Abkhazia. Both sides have called for an international commission to investigate these charges.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

15. The unabated fighting in Abkhazia has led to the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians from the region and has created a serious humanitarian situation in the areas of conflict which has been aggravated by the winter season. Reports have been received that in some parts of Abkhazia there exists a humanitarian emergency situation, especially in the area of the town of Tkvarcheli whose population has been inflated by a large number of refugees, which is under Abkhaz control but access is blockaded by Georgian forces.

16. Two of the United Nations officials in Georgia, accompanied by a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), visited the Tkvarcheli area. They were told that there was an urgent need for the delivery of basic foodstuffs, medical supplies and winter clothes. The Russian Federation has offered to provide emergency food supplies which would be transported by Russian helicopters with red cross markings from the Russian city of Sochi to Tkvarchelli. The United Nations has been asked to consider the possibility of making available a small number of observers to oversee the

loading, transportation and unloading of foodstuff. The United Nations Interim Office in Tbilisi is urgently following up this matter with all concerned and is expected to submit shortly specific suggestions to United Nations Headquarters.

17. Furthermore, following a request from the Government of Georgia, a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission will visit Georgia, including Abkhazia, at the end of January 1993. That mission, which is coordinated by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), will include representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

18. Since my last report to the Council I received two letters from the Chairman of the Parliament and Head of State of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze. In his letter dated 11 November 1992, Mr. Shevardnadze stated, inter alia, that the confrontation in Abkhazia had intensified and that the number of casualties was growing. Mr. Shevardnadze also noted that time was running out for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. He therefore urged prompt Security Council action in support of a peaceful solution to the Abkhaz crisis (see S/24802).

19. In his letter of 25 December 1992, Mr. Shevardnadze expressed his deep concern that an escalation of the conflict in Abkhazia could destabilize the entire Caucasus region. He stated, inter alia, that the infiltration of irregular forces and military supplies from the North Caucasian region of the Russian Federation in support of the Abkhaz forces was continuing. Mr. Shevardnadze again requested that the Abkhaz conflict should be placed on the agenda of the Security Council and, in view of the possible escalation of the conflict, that it should be discussed in a formal meeting of the Council. He stated that the Security Council may wish to adopt a resolution which, inter alia, could provide for the sending of a United Nations peace-keeping force to Abkhazia. He further deemed it appropriate that the Council appeal to all Member States of the United Nations not to allow any encroachment of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia (see S/25026).

20. As a follow-up to his letter of 25 December 1992, Mr. Shevardnadze sent a Special Envoy, Mr. Sandro Kavsadze, to the United Nations to consult with the President and the members of the Security Council as well as Secretariat officials on possible further steps that could be taken by the United Nations in the support of the resumption of the peace process and to be present during the deliberations of the Council. In line with Mr. Shevardnadze's letter, the Special Envoy has stressed his Government's desire for a more active United Nations engagement to revitalize the peace process.

21. In his discussions with United Nations officials, the Special Envoy made the following points: (1) the Georgian Government would be willing to resume the peace process on the basis of the 3 September Agreement and would accept an immediate cease-fire, provided the status quo prior to the Abkhaz attack of

1 October 1992 would be restored. (2) The Government of Georgia would wish the deployment of United Nations observers/peace-keeping forces to monitor the Georgian-Russian border in Abkhazia and to protect the railway and the communication links in Abkhazia. In this context, the Georgian officials pointed out that the reopening of this transportation route would also be very much in the interest of Armenia. (3) The Government of Georgia would welcome the good offices of the Secretary-General to study the Abkhaz problem and to make recommendations for its peaceful resolution. The Government of Georgia would be willing to commit itself to these recommendations on the understanding they respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia as well as the human rights of all citizens of Georgia.

OBSERVATIONS

22. The situation in Abkhazia has further deteriorated since my letter on 10 November 1992 to the Council. The continued fighting poses a serious threat to the maintenance of international peace and security in the entire Caucasus region and beyond. The outbreak of inter-ethnic fighting in the beginning of November 1992 between North Ossetian and Ingush forces in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation, prompting the establishment of a temporary state of emergency by President Yeltsin, is an additional indication of the potentially explosive situation in the Caucasus. As I stated in my last report to the Council, unless the situation is redressed, the possibility of the eruption of a major conflict is high.

23. The 3 September Agreement still offers the best basis for the resumption of the peace process. However, the restoration of a viable peace process in Abkhazia, based on the provisions of the 3 September Agreement, may require a more active support of the international community to assist the parties to agree to a cease-fire and to work out a political settlement.

24. To this end, I am considering the possibility of dispatching a new mission to Georgia to review the situation in Abkhazia in order to assess the overall political situation. The mission could also discuss and provide advice on practical matters such as the establishment and monitoring of an immediate cease-fire, with particular emphasis on the border in Abkhazia between Georgia and the Russian Federation and on the protection of the railway and communication links in Abkhazia. I may also dispatch a human rights fact-finding mission to Abkhazia to look into allegations of human rights violations by both sides. Should the Security Council favour this line of action, I would carry it out as soon as practicable.